

I oppose loosening the rules designed to promote and protect diversity of media ownership. These rules were adopted to ensure that the public would receive a diverse range of viewpoints from the media, and not simply the opinions of a handful of media conglomerates.

I am writing in strong support of the efforts of US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Commissioner Michael J. Copps in raising concerns that concentration of media ownership poses a serious threat to freedom of expression. His colleagues in the FCC, including FCC chairman Michael K. Powell, would like to relax the country's broadcast regulation rules, in particular the regulations that limit the size of America's largest media conglomerates. The majority of the FCC commissioners favor lifting limits on local radio ownership and the lifting of the ban on common ownership of a television and radio station or TV station and newspaper in the same local market. Consumer advocates warn that still bigger 'big media' will raise the price of services, undermine the quality and independence of journalism and create a homogeneous commercial media.

Mr. Copps, in contrast, has been the only member of the five-person commission (one seat is vacant) to defend those rules as essential in order to encourage diversity of voices, local programming and consumer choice.

The decision being made here will have a crucial impact on the future of our democracy, because of the importance of the media in informing U.S. citizens. These include the airwaves, which belong to the people, not to media conglomerates. This is a huge giveaway of public resources and political power to a tiny few.

The quality of local, national, and international reporting has diminished appreciably over the years in our local market, even as the number of outlets has apparently increased (e.g., the number of cable news options). This is because these outlets have become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, and reflect their views, not the views of those with alternative viewpoints or the "have-nots". As the number of media outlets in cable TV and electronic media has increased, we have not seen increases in media owned or controlled by persons of color and women, nor the diversity of programming consumed by the average citizen. Even voices such as National Public Radio appear increasingly beholden to commercial interests and less likely to perform effective and critical monitoring of the public interest. It is not appropriate to determine diversity, as Chairman Powell and most of the other FCC commissioners advocate, by including every web site!

and cable channel in their determination, when outlets provided by mega-corporations are becoming powerful and dominant.

The FCC must consider the clout of big media in an overall assessment of the diversity of viewpoints available to US citizens. They have not done this; big media voices overwhelm citizens; exposure to alternative viewpoints. Furthermore, locally owned and controlled media outlets more effectively serve their communities than do those of chain or network-owned properties. They have a stake in their communities, and are more likely to reflect and respect local diversity and local views.

Limits on media ownership are more important than ever to promote diversity of expression, reporting and analysis in the media. Please consider supporting Commissioner Copps and vigorously opposing further media deregulation and supporting continued public debate of this crucial issue. I do not believe it is an exaggeration to assert that nothing less than the future of our democracy is at stake.

